

## **ABSTRACT**

### **RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: THE BAN OF RELIGIOUS PARTIES AND THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC ACTORS IN MALI'S AND SENEGAL'S DEMOCRATIZATIONS**

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The comparative paper analyzes the role of religious actors in the democratization processes of the two Muslim-majority democracies Mali and Senegal, which since 1992 have been categorized as free/partially free and democratic by Freedom House and Polity IV respectively.

The Harvard Religion and Global Politics Research Project examined the role of religious actors and institutions in 82 cases of democratization worldwide between 1972 and 2000, and concluded that in a third of the cases, religious actors played an important and constructive role towards democratization. In contrast to what one might expect, crucial factors that appeared to facilitate this largely constructive role were not particularly liberal theologies, gender-egalitarian values or internally democratic structures of religious organizations. Rather, the research project concluded that religious organizations could only exert a positive role towards the erosion of authoritarian power and a democratic transition if religious actors and institutions enjoyed substantial freedom from state control and possibilities to avert state co-optation – in particular, where they enjoyed some legal autonomy which allowed them to become a platform for dissent, and transnational linkages which made them financially less dependent on domestic sources of income. Recent qualitative research by the author of this paper and by Mirjam Künkler (findings forthcoming in 2009) on the role of religious actors in five young democracies confirmed Harvard's findings. Moreover, Künkler and Leininger show that religious actors' influence on democratic transition and consolidation are foremost conditioned by legal-institutional and organizational factors.

Against this background the paper inquires whether these findings also apply to Mali and Senegal. In doing so, it will shed light on the degree to which the state – in the political and legal opportunities it grants to religious actors and organizations – shapes religious actors' behaviour during transition and consolidation processes. The paper aims at giving a systematic overview of the role of religious actors in the erosion of authoritarianism, democratic transition and subsequent democratic consolidation as well as de-democratization processes, and attempts to identify common patterns and factors that have prompted religious actors to support or obstruct these processes. In this, the constitutional ban of religious parties in both West African states is of particular interest here. In other words, if religious actors' political influence is conditioned by organizational factors on the one hand and they are not allowed to articulate their interests through formal intermediary political institutions such as political parties on the other hand, how and with which impact do they exert their influence on (de-)democratization?